

Opening Statement of the Honorable Fred Upton
Subcommittee on Health
Markup of 21st Century Cures and the Microbead-Free Waters Act
May 14, 2015

(As Prepared for Delivery)

The NIH was founded in 1887; the FDA was founded in 1906. We passed the National Cancer Act in 1971, and the human genome was mapped by 2003.

The last century and the century before it brought remarkable medical breakthroughs. From X-rays and anesthesia to pacemakers and transplants, the tools to diagnose and treat patients have been transformed over and over and over again.

Yet for every disease we demolish, every condition we cure, there are thousands more still plaguing our people. The numbers capture the challenges we face. Of the 10,000 known diseases – 7,000 of which are rare – there are treatments for only 500 of them.

The history of health innovation is remarkable. But the future is where I've set my sights. I've got my eye on 21st Century Cures. And I want to ensure that the laws, regulations, and resources governing the quest for better and faster treatments keeps pace with scientific advances.

So what does it take to vanquish a disease? Billions of dollars, millions of hours, thousands of researchers, and hundreds of failed attempts can go into the development of a single treatment or cure. The cost of developing a new drug now has doubled since the early 1980s. And it takes upwards of 15 years from initial molecular targeting to bring a drug to market.

It's daunting. It can seem impossible. But still, patients hold out hope.

Brave children like two little angels in Mattawan Michigan, my friends Brooke and Brielle Kennedy who have SMA, battle through pain, transcend physical limitations, and live lives filled with joy and optimism. Our brothers and sisters, moms and dads, grandparents and friends, they all keep faith in the future, in spite of suffering.

The 21st Century Cures initiative is for them. It's for those we've lost, those who grapple with sickness today, and those who will be diagnosed tomorrow. It's for the best and the brightest minds, the researchers who gravitate to this punishing field because they relish the challenge to make the impossible a reality.

Today, we write the prologue to a new chapter in health and hope. We begin to usher in a new era of collaboration and innovation among the researchers and regulators, the patients and physicians, who hold the key to cures.

There is no cause more worthy, no challenge more urgent. We need 21st Century Cures, and we need them now. As Brooke and Brielle always say with a smile and a sparkle in their eyes, "We can, and we will."

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